

FLORIN JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE
Oral History Project
California Civil Liberties Public Education Program Grant

Oral History Interview

with

SHIZUKO ITO

March 26, 2000
Campbell, California

By Susan Hida

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER

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INTERVIEW TIME AND PLACE

March 26, 2000
Campbell, California

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs were obtained from Shizuko Ito.

TYPING AND EDITING

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TAPES AND INTERVIEW RECORDS

Copies of the bound transcript and the original tapes will be kept by Florin Japanese American Citizens League and in the University Archives Library, California State University, Sacramento, 2000 State University Drive, Sacramento, California 95819.

[TAPE 1, SIDE A]

HIDA: This is an interview with Shizuko Ito, a Nisei¹ woman, age 94, in Campbell, California, at the home of her son and daughter-in-law, Sunday, March 26, year 2000. I am Susan Hida, grandniece of Shizuko Ito, and I am accompanied by Bernice Ito, Shizu's daughter-in-law. Support is being received from the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program and the Florin JACL² for which we are grateful.

Shizu, thank you for being a part of our Oral History Project and helping future generations to know what life was like back before the days of computers and cellular phones and video games, and especially how life was hard in World War II. So, why don't we go back to the beginning. Can you tell me something about your parents? Do you remember your parents? Did they ever talk about Japan?

ITO: No, they didn't.

HIDA: They were concentrating on the present then, I guess.

ITO: Yes.

¹ Nisei: Second generation; a native U. S. or Canadian citizen born of immigrant Japanese parents and educated in America.

² JACL: Japanese American Citizens League, membership-driven national civil rights organization of Americans of Japanese ancestry.

HIDA: Let's go back to the early 1900s, then. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

ITO: I was born on April 19, 1905.

HIDA: In what city?

ITO: In Mayfield, California. [Now Palo Alto]

HIDA: Can you tell us about Mayfield?

ITO: It's a little hick town. [LAUGHTER]

HIDA: Was it mostly farming or were there stores?

ITO: Let's see. Did we have a restaurant? I don't know whether--if we did have a restaurant. I know we had a grammar school. And then by the time I graduated, they had a new one. First, they had [an old] one.

HIDA: So the streets probably were dirt back then--dirt streets.

ITO: Well, there used to be a highway right through the town.

HIDA: I see. Was that for cars or for horses?

ITO: What was that? Anyhow, this street goes up around over the highway--Mayfield to Palo Alto--Menlo Park.

HIDA: Did you live on this street or did you live . . .

ITO: Oh, I lived on --now, I really don't know the name of the street--I don't remember. But the main street, and then I lived in one of those side streets.

HIDA: I see. You probably walked everywhere.

ITO: Oh, yes. We--I had a bicycle when I was ten years old. I received a bicycle for [my] birthday. And we used to ride the bicycle to town.

HIDA: I see. Good.

ITO: We had a grocery store there on the corner, and then they had a--post office.

It was sort of a family home, but they had the post office.

HIDA: Oh, they worked at the post office?

ITO: They lived in back of that, I don't know. So they had mail boxes in there.

HIDA: A lot smaller than today. Do you remember what your father did--what kind of work?

ITO: Well, my father at one time was a cook for a sorority. And then he worked at the Stanford³. There were two Japanese--my father and another Japanese, and they cleaned the place, you know, and then they changed it. I guess they got--what do you call it? Well, they lost the job. He lost the job. I don't remember whether the other man that was still there or not, but it didn't last very long, so he worked. Then he used to go to other farms and cook outside.

[LAUGHTER]

HIDA: So he must have been a good cook.

ITO: Oh, I don't know how he learned. He must have learned from cookbooks, because he didn't used to cook at home.

HIDA: Did you ever eat his cooking?

ITO: Oh, yes. He used to make cakes and things and bring it home.

HIDA: Oh, I see. Do you think he lost the job at Stanford because he was Japanese?

ITO: I kind of think so.

HIDA: So he went to cook for other families then?

³ Stanford: Stanford University; Stanford, California; coed; 1885.

ITO: They used to work for families. He did work for the sorority for a while. I don't know how long he did, but he used to bake cakes. That's one thing we enjoyed.

HIDA: What kind of cakes? American or Japanese?

ITO: Oh, American cakes. You know, a regular cake.

HIDA: Frosting.

ITO: Yes, frosting and everything.

HIDA: OK. How about the rest of your family--your brothers and sisters? Can you tell me about those?

ITO: Well, we were a family of four girls.

HIDA: Four girls.

ITO: Yes. The oldest was born in San Francisco. The second one was born in Gilroy.

HIDA: The first one's name was Shu.

ITO: Shu. And then Hide--Hide was born in Gilroy.

HIDA: Hide was 1903, right?

ITO: Yes, uh-huh.

HIDA: That's my grandmother.

ITO: Yes. And then I was born in '05, and Mitsu was born in 1910.

HIDA: Also in Gilroy or Mayfield?

ITO: Mayfield.

HIDA: Mayfield, I see. OK. So you were the third oldest, right?

ITO: I was the third one.

HIDA: Right, OK. What kinds of things did you do as a family? Did you go to movies or picnics?

ITO: Well, we were called the boarding house.

HIDA: Oh, your house?

ITO: Our house was a boarding house. So, I guess, when people passed through they stayed over. When I was, I think, five years old, I got diphtheria, and so my father couldn't go to work. He had to take care of me, and it happened to be-- there was a lady from Palo Alto, I think, happened to be over, and she couldn't go home either. She had to stay, because she was exposed to diphtheria.

HIDA: I see.

ITO: So my mother took care of the children and everybody else, but I was confined to one room with my dad.

HIDA: I see. So you said like a boarding house, so did you . . .

ITO: It's not a real boarding house, but it was house.

HIDA: Big house.

ITO: Yes. With us kids.

HIDA: So how many people sitting around the dining room table for dinner?

ITO: Oh, nothing that fanciful. It was a regular boarding house, but just a few people who passed through.

HIDA: I see. Would it be the four of you girls . . .

ITO: Yeah.

HIDA: . . .and mother and father . . .

ITO: Uh-huh.

HIDA: . . . and then anybody--other people too?

ITO: No. Otherwise, they just came to visit, in other words.

HIDA: I see. OK. So, what kinds of things did you talk about around the dinner table?
Do you remember?

ITO: That I don't remember. [LAUGHTER]

HIDA: Too long time ago. Do you remember when you were a little girl, did you have
chores or responsibilities--things you had to do?

ITO: No, I don't think--I don't remember having anything that I had to do. As you
know, I used to go to a Christian church.

HIDA: Christian church.

ITO: It was an AME church--Methodist.

HIDA: Methodist, I see.

ITO: There was no--there was no--what do you call . . .

HIDA: Japanese?

ITO: Yeah. We were the only Japanese in this town. And when we moved, another
Japanese family came in--Yoshida.

HIDA: Well, did people treat you differently because you were Japanese?

ITO: No, I don't think so. We rented a house--just paid \$10 a month . . .

HIDA: Wow!

ITO: . . . at that time.

HIDA: Could you buy a house if you wanted to?

ITO: No. I'll tell you about another thing. So that house--we had a fire. So then we moved to another place, and when we were going to move, they said, "I'll sell you this house for \$732." We didn't have that money to buy it.

HIDA: Hmm. Too bad. So did you lose everything in the fire?

ITO: Yes, I think we did. And when we had the fire, your grandmother was the only one that wore her clothes. She was all dressed and ready, and we were all in our nightgowns.

HIDA: Was it cold outside?

ITO: I don't know--[LAUGHTER] [I don't] remember whether it was cold or not but we just got out of bed. You grandmother was so--she was completely dressed.

HIDA: So then the fire department came and put out the fire?

ITO: I don't remember how--what happened to it, but I know people took us in. I had a second grade teacher that lived near us out that way. I think I stayed there that night. And then there was a place where the students--Japanese students stayed. That was in Mayfield too. And some of us went over there and stayed for the night.

HIDA: Your sisters.

ITO: Yes.

HIDA: And your parents. That was a Caucasian teacher, right?

ITO: Yes, they were all Caucasians. But there was no--what do you call [Japanese Community]--well, they treated us just like everybody else. I went to grammar school and got along with them.

HIDA: Oh, that's good. Now this Japanese house that you said was in Mayfield, was that for the students going to Stanford?

ITO: Yes, they lived in this place, and then my mother used to cook for --I think one meal--maybe supper, I guess, it was. They used to come to eat at the house.

HIDA: At your house. Oh, that sounds like a lot of people.

ITO: No, there were not so many people. Only students--maybe about four people--four or five students. At least the ones that used to come mostly.

HIDA: The Japanese students that went to Stanford then, did they speak Japanese when they came over to your house during dinner?

ITO: I guess they did to my parents. That's natural.

HIDA: Did you understand?

ITO: I don't think so.

HIDA: I see. So you learned Japanese later.

ITO: Well, my mother and father spoke Japanese so then we . . .

HIDA: Kind of learned it automatically, maybe.

ITO: Yeah, uh-huh.

HIDA: They spoke Japanese to each other, right?

ITO: Yes, I imagine so. But my mother didn't speak much English.

HIDA: Oh, OK. So she spoke to you in Japanese. But at school, of course, you spoke English. OK, so you don't think you had any jobs, any chores around the house? You didn't have to help clean or make your bed or . . .

ITO: No. I don't remember anything like that. I guess we did, but I . . .

HIDA: Do you remember whether there were any rules?

ITO: The only kind of work I did when I was going to school during the summer they used to have a cannery. We used to go to work and earn a little bit of money. We were paid so much a box.

HIDA: That was fruit, right?

ITO: Yes, fruit.

HIDA: I see. I remember. Apricots?

ITO: Uh-huh, yeah..

HIDA: How old were you about then?

ITO: Oh, I guess, I was about fourteen. I think they took them from about fourteen. That's the only kind of work we did while we were going to school.

HIDA: I see. OK. When you were smaller, though, when you were a little girl, do you remember? Were you ever punished?

ITO: Punished?

HIDA: Punished. Did you do something wrong and your mother or your father had to discipline you?

ITO: Oh, yes, most likely I did. [LAUGHTER]

HIDA: Or was that more the other--your sisters?

ITO: I used to fight with my sister--your grandmother.

HIDA: Hide.

ITO: Yes.

HIDA: I see. What did you fight about?

ITO: Oh, you know--any kind of thing. I really don't know or remember what I did fight about, but we used to fight.

HIDA: Were there anything really hard about your childhood that you remember?

Difficult times when you were small? You always had enough to eat, it sounds like. And you had a place to stay.

ITO: Nothing that I remember.

HIDA: OK. Do you want to tell me more about your mother?

ITO: My mother died when I was fourteen.

HIDA: That must have been hard.

ITO: So after that we had to take care of the house, and cook, and buy food. Shu was cooking and then Hide, and then after they graduated high school, they worked in San Francisco.

HIDA: So they moved out of the house.

ITO: No, they were riding a train, or sort of a little train to San Francisco and then after I graduated high school, it was too much trouble to commute--all three of us, so we moved to San Francisco.

HIDA: Oh, I see, and Mitsu too?

ITO: Yes, Mitsu too.

HIDA: I see.

ITO: So Mitsu went to San Francisco [Girl's High] school.

HIDA: Your mother died of the flu?

ITO: Yes, it was a funny thing. We went to a grocery--I mean--yeah--the Japanese grocery for New Year food, and she said, "Oh, I'm healthy. I took care of my two children. They both passed school, so I'm healthy." She bragged about it.

And then five days later, she caught the flu and died. So I always felt never brag, you know.

HIDA: That's a big lesson. So she passed away, and then your father was still cooking for other people at that time?

ITO: Yes, he was working--cooking for. . .

HIDA: A family.

ITO: Yes.

HIDA: Do you remember--was there a memorial service for your mother? Or were you too sick and couldn't go out, maybe?

ITO: When my mother died, just Mitsu and I went to the funeral. Shu and Hide--both had the flu, so I went with my father to the funeral.

HIDA: Lot of people there?

ITO: There were not too many people in Mayfield to begin with.

HIDA: Oh, yes. But, you said you were going to the Japanese grocery store for New Year's food, so there was at least a Japanese grocery?

ITO: Yes, there was a Japanese grocery.

HIDA: I see. OK. So why don't we move on to--[you are] a little bit older now--maybe you're teenagers. Did you belong to any clubs or scouts or things like that?

ITO: I was--there was one Christian church group. I remember a lady--I think it was Mrs. Baker or somebody. I was the only one there. The rest--I mean none of my other sisters were there. Just I was there.

HIDA: That was just something you wanted to do?

ITO: No, just like a girl's club or something. I don't know if it was out of the church, but anyhow, we used to meet there.

HIDA: There was no Japan town in Mayfield, right, because you were the only Japanese people?

ITO: Well, for a long time we were the only Japanese people, and then this Yoshida family came. Then we moved to San Francisco.

HIDA: I see. How old were you when you moved to San Francisco?

ITO: I must have been around nineteen, I guess. Somewhere around there.

HIDA: Did you ever--did you play piano or take any music lessons?

ITO: Yes, I did.

HIDA: What did you do?

ITO: We took piano lessons.

HIDA: So you had . . .

ITO: But I was never very good. [LAUGHTER] We just took it while we were in grammar school. When we went to high school, we didn't--we stopped.

HIDA: I see. So did you have a piano at your house?

ITO: Yes, I had--we had a piano.

HIDA: Did you ever go on picnics?

ITO: Oh, yes, we would--just the family.

HIDA: Where did you go? Do you remember?

ITO: Oh, just the mountains--the hills or wherever it was. We didn't go very far.

HIDA: So you just walked.

ITO: Yes.

HIDA: I see. Did you go to Japanese language school? Probably there wasn't one.

ITO: I went to Japanese school when I was working in San Francisco. We used to go at night-after school--Mitsu and I.

HIDA: Was it for children or was it for adults?

ITO: No, it was at a lady's house--private lessons.

HIDA: And then you formally--more formally learned Japanese, right?

ITO: Yes, well, but now I can't read it. [LAUGHTER]

HIDA: They taught you some kanji⁴?

ITO: Oh, yeah, uh-huh. We learned how to write and everything but it's nothing to me now. I can't even--I brought the books out and looked at them, but I can't read it anymore.

HIDA: Did you also learn some Japanese culture--ikebana or odori or koto⁵ or any of those kinds of things?

ITO: I took ikebana. You see, after all, I was pretty old.

HIDA: After your kids were born.

ITO: Oh, yes.

HIDA: We forgot to say for the record the name of your grade school. Do you remember that? The name of your grade school?

ITO: Oh, my grade school? I think no special name--I think it was Mayfield Grammar School.

⁴ Kanji: Chinese character

⁵ Ikebana: flower arrangement; odori: dancing; koto: Japanese harp

HIDA: And again you were about--you were the only Japanese-American little girl then, right?

ITO: Yes, and I remember we had one boy in our class when I graduated the eighth grade. One boy! The rest were all girls.

ITO: Did any of the kids invite you over to their house to play?

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

HIDA: This is Tape 1, Side B, continued. OK, we were talking about school. You said that the Meyer family invited you over to their house?

ITO: Oh, yes. They had a girl, a boy--I think . . .

HIDA: You would run in and out of their house--no big deal?

ITO: Well, we didn't go there all the time, but they used to come to our house too.

HIDA: Their parents liked you though.

ITO: Uh-huh.

HIDA: I see. OK. Did your parents have any contacts with the school?

ITO: No, I think my mother never went. My mother used to go to the church sometimes, you know, when we had a little affair or something, but she never came to the school.

HIDA: But if you brought homework home, did she make sure you did it?

ITO: Oh, I just naturally did. [Chuckles]

HIDA: Oh, you did, OK. Now, back to being a teenager. What was the name of your high school?

ITO: Palo Alto Union High.

HIDA: Palo Alto Union High. You probably had to take the train or trolley there? Or did you walk?

ITO: Oh, yes, I walked.

HIDA: To high school.

ITO: It was quite a ways. We had to go through the highway to the school.

HIDA: What do you remember about being a teenager? Did you do clubs or you go to dances or . . .

ITO: No, I never went to a dance.

HIDA: Maybe they didn't have them then.

ITO: The Japanese club had students going to Stanford. They used to have dance maybe once a year or something. At that time they invited us.

HIDA: The college students invited the high school girls?

ITO: No, just us. We were the only Japanese there.

HIDA: Oh, I see. Then you and your sisters were the only Japanese in the high school in Palo Alto?

ITO: Uh-huh.

HIDA: Really? OK. So, what other things did you do to have fun--you and your classmates or your sisters?

ITO: Nothing exciting. We played baseball. Yes, we used to play with the neighbors--Caucasian girls.

HIDA: All girls?

ITO: Yeah. We never played with boys.

HIDA: I don't blame you. [LAUGHTER] Did you have a mitt then? A soft mitt? A baseball mitt?

ITO: I think we had one mitt, I don't know. Somebody gave us those, I guess.

HIDA: So you had to share.

ITO: Yes.

There was a park right near us--our place where we were living. So we had a little yard in the back. We played baseball there. Oh, I remember one girl -- she's Harrington. She used to play baseball. She would come over. She used to live about a block away or something. You know, not real fancy baseball, but just ball, running and . . .

HIDA: So of the four sisters, who was the athlete? Was there one of you more of an athlete than the others?

ITO: I don't remember my older sisters playing with us. I was playing with these friends of mine.

HIDA: And Mitsu too?

ITO: Mitsu was much younger--say, five years younger, so she didn't play with us very much.

HIDA: I see. OK.

ITO: That's why she was lonely. And I thought I wanted to be with my other two sisters, and here I was always left home. They would go somewhere, and I was left home with Mitsu. And I thought, "My goodness!" [LAUGHTER]

HIDA: You wanted to be with the older ones.

ITO: Oh, yes.

HIDA: By then, you guys were by yourselves. Your mother was gone, so if you had to talk about things like you normally talk to your mother about then, did you talk to your father?

ITO: No, I never talked to my father about . . .

HIDA: So if you had to confide in somebody, it would be your sisters or your friends?

ITO: I don't know. I don't remember confiding in my sisters. We --I mean if I had any trouble, I did it myself.

HIDA: So all during high school, you don't really remember any racial prejudice? You don't think there was any in that area?

ITO: When I was in high school, there was only one girl that I used to always go out with --her name was Wendy [Caucasian]. We used to get together.

HIDA: But again, you were the only Japanese American in Palo Alto?

ITO: I was a A boy and me were the only Japanese in--at high school when I was there.

HIDA: Were you friends with the boy?

ITO: No, not friends, but I knew who he was. He was the only boy in the class.

HIDA: So then you graduated from high school. Was that fancy? A party? High school graduation? Was there a party or ceremony?

ITO: Oh, there was a graduation, but I don't know. I was--I remember I was on the stage for something--for some reason, but I don't remember what it was for.

HIDA: That's a long time ago. Is there anything else you want to add about high school? Grade school?

ITO: No, nothing special.

HIDA: OK, then let's go on. After high school, what did you do?

ITO: I went to UC [University of California] one year.

HIDA: UC Berkeley--in Berkeley.

ITO: But then I stayed at a lady's house as a schoolgirl.

HIDA: Did you pay rent or did you cook for her?

ITO: I guess I helped with the dishes or something. Anyway, she let me stay there for nothing for one year.

HIDA: What kinds of things did you study?

ITO: I studied botany, Japanese, English and French or something like that.

HIDA: Wow!

ITO: But I didn't prepare to go to college, so I hadn't taken geometry. I had taken algebra but not geometry, and to graduate you had to have those things, and I used to think about it, and I thought, "Well, I guess I'd better not go." And so after one year, I quit. And then I went to Healds Business College, and then from then on I got a job. I worked at Pacific Dry Goods. Then I went to Ino Merchandise. Then after I got married and the children were big, I worked for Marbo Quality Foods. That was in Fresno.

HIDA: I see. So you were in the Healds Business School for about a year?

ITO: No, not a year. About a half a year.

HIDA: Half a year. And you learned typing, and shorthand and . . .

ITO: Yes, typing and shorthand.

HIDA: So then your first job?

ITO: Pacific Dry Goods.

HIDA: You remember how much you got paid there?

ITO: Seventy-five dollars a month. That's my first job.

HIDA: Were you living in--still in San Francisco with your sisters?

ITO: Yes. We bought--not bought a house, but rented a house in San Francisco.

ITO: When I went to Berkeley, I lived at this doctor's house and had a room.

HIDA: In Berkeley, if you wanted to go see your sisters then, you took a boat, right?

ITO: Yeah, you had to take a boat.

HIDA: And then Pacific Dry Goods--from there you went to the other one.

ITO: They split and then I went to the other boss's, and it was Ino Merchandise. I got married from that place.

HIDA: Oh, I see. So these companies--were you the only Japanese American again, or were there other. . .

ITO: At Ino Merchandise, I was the only one.

HIDA: I see.

ITO: But in the Pacific Dry Goods, we had other girls. I met other Japanese girls there. Pacific Dry Goods is a Japanese company.

HIDA: Oh, OK.

ITO: Ino Merchandise was where I was when I got married and quit. They gave me a diamond watch!

HIDA: So you didn't really feel--there were no racial problems back then?

ITO: Oh, no, nothing like that.

HIDA: OK.

ITO: Because this Pacific Dry Goods, they had a store on Grand Avenue. Pacific Dry Goods was the wholesale part of the company.

HIDA: I see. So you did typing and whatnot.

ITO: I did office work and when the salesmen came in, I used to help them.

HIDA: So then about that time you started thinking about getting married?

ITO: No, I didn't think about it, but somebody suggested you were to get married.

HIDA: Somebody at your work?

ITO: No, no. Somebody that arranged your grandmother's marriage.

HIDA: Mochizuki, the baishakunin⁶.

ITO: Yes, Mr. Mochizuki. He got Hide married. Then there was another man that was --he was married once and separated, and he was alone, so he said, "Will you go [meet him]?" you know, and my husband said, "OK," and so we got married.

HIDA: I remember you talking about that you and Mitsu made sushi when you first met [your husband].

ITO: Is that right? [LAUGHTER] The mother-in-law . . .

HIDA: His mother?

ITO: Mrs. Ito, the older Ito came to our place where we were staying. We were staying in the first floor of a house--American--in . . .

HIDA: In San Francisco.

ITO: At that time. Oh, she told you about that? [LAUGHTER] My sister Mitsu?

HIDA: No, I think you told me about that.

ITO: Really?

HIDA: Yes, I think so.

ITO: [LAUGHTER] A lady like that who is so good in cooking and here we
[LAUGHTER]

HIDA: You didn't think your sushi was good?

ITO: No. [LAUGHTER] I don't know. It's so embarrassing. [LAUGHTER] Well,
that's the part when I found out who she was.

HIDA: Well, you got married though. So he came over to meet you in your house or
how did that work?

ITO: No, your [grand] mother and [grand] father took me to Fresno to see him.

HIDA: Oh, drove--drove to Fresno--my grandparents.

ITO: He just came in, looked, and that's it. He didn't say anything at all. "What do
you think?" He said, "OK."

HIDA: Did you have on a nice--what were you wearing? Do you remember?

ITO: No, ordinary clothes.

HIDA: Western style?

ITO: And then his mother came to San Francisco for a visit. Then he came one time,
and stayed couple nights, maybe. I mean he went to a hotel.

HIDA: In San Francisco?

ITO: Yes. About a week, maybe.

HIDA: So you went out on some dates there in San Francisco.

ITO: After work.

⁶ Baishakunin: Person who arranges marriages.

HIDA: Did your sister meet him. Did Mitsu meet him during this week?

ITO: Oh, of course.

HIDA: So then, did you ask her later, "Do you think he is OK?"

ITO: I don't know. We're not that way. [LAUGHTER] She wouldn't care anyhow.

I have to be . . .

HIDA: Make the decision.

ITO: Yeah, make up my mind.

HIDA: I see. So did you have any criteria like did your husband have to be handsome or he have a good job, or serious, or joker, or . . .

ITO: No, you know, they had a little store--a little dry goods store.

HIDA: I see. So he was doing OK. So how soon thereafter did you have the wedding?

ITO: I don't know how soon, but we were married on December 4, 1937.

HIDA: 1937. In Fresno?

ITO: In Fresno.

HIDA: I see. Was everybody there? All your sisters? Mitsu there . . .

ITO: Oh, yeah.

HIDA: Hide? By then Shu was probably gone, right?. Shu had left already for China--or for Japan?

ITO: Yes, I think so.

HIDA: Do you remember the time when she left at all?

ITO: I don't remember exactly, but she went home with my father and this man.

When he went to Japan and wanted to come back here, he couldn't come back.

My father had something that he couldn't come back.

HIDA: Wasn't that the eye disease or something?

ITO: I don't know--some disease that he couldn't come back to California with. And then he passed away.

HIDA: Yeah, OK. So Shu was over there, and you got married in Fresno and then you stayed in Fresno, right? You lived there.

ITO: Uh-huh..

HIDA: Did you have a house? Where did you live?

ITO: He had a house. It was within walking distance of his store.

HIDA: I see--his dry goods store.

ITO: Yes.

HIDA: What kinds of things did you sell there?

ITO: I think they had everything--materials--they had shoes.

HIDA: So then there were all these problems in the world. Then the war. So when did you start feeling afraid, or scared, or worried about the things that were happening in Japan with the war?

ITO: Oh, after the war?

HIDA: No, before the war. Remember there were probably things on the radio or things in the newspaper that were not very good about Japanese people.

ITO: I don't remember worrying about that.

HIDA: No? OK. Do you remember how you heard about Pearl Harbor⁷?

ITO: Oh, I know when it happened, because it was in the newspaper.

⁷ Pearl Harbor: Inlet on the south coast of Oahu, Hawaii, near Honolulu; site of a U. S. Naval base bombed by Japan, December 7, 1941.

HIDA: So did you find out by reading the newspaper about Pearl Harbor?

ITO: I guess so.

HIDA: Then, did you get worried after that?

ITO: No. You can't Well, I don't know how to explain it. [Shi-kata ga nai.⁸]

HIDA: You couldn't go out.

ITO: We used to have a--what do you call . . .

HIDA: How many. . . . Let's back up. You had kids. When was the first . . .

ITO: What?

HIDA: When was your first son [Tomi] born?

ITO: First? 1938.

HIDA: 1938, OK. And then how about the second son?

ITO: The second son was born in '41.

HIDA: And then you read about Pearl Harbor. You had two kids, right?

ITO: Yes, he was a baby yet . . .

HIDA: Albert Shunji.

ITO: . . . when Pearl Harbor [was bombed]. And then in May 1942 we had to leave the house; put everything in one room--I mean personal things. I guess we left all our bed sets . . .

HIDA: Furniture.

ITO: . . . in the --because that was just one room for our real personal things and we locked it up. I don't know whether they sold the things or what, but . . .

HIDA: I see. You had rented that house?

ITO: Yes, we rented the house to some Mexican people, I think it was.

HIDA: When you went into camp?

ITO: Yes, when we left for Fresno Assembly Center⁹.

HIDA: So you went to Fresno Assembly Center, and how long were you there?

ITO: Let's see, it was May and, I think, in October we went to Gila¹⁰. And we said we have old people and we didn't want to go back East to Arkansas¹¹. We were supposed to go to Arkansas.

HIDA: Oh. So you got to go to . . .

ITO: So we got to go to Gila. And so Block--Camp 1, Block 28.

HIDA: Let's go back when you left Fresno. Do you remember how much time you had to pack up everything?

ITO: We didn't have very much time.

HIDA: Do you think it was like a week or month or days?

ITO: I think around a week or so, I guess. We didn't have very much time. We had to pack up, and then we had to figure what to bring.

HIDA: Then what about the business?

ITO: Oh, the business. The Jewish people came and they said, "I'll pay you \$550 for the contents; take it or leave it." That was the thing. And they took everything that was in the store. They even had the tools, you know, and they wouldn't let

⁸ Shi-kata ga nai: There is nothing we can do about it.

⁹ Fresno Assembly Center: One of the temporary detention camps in operation from late March 1942 to about middle of October 1942, where internee families were kept until relocated to more permanent detention camps called Relocation Centers. (*Ten Visits* by Frank and Joanne Iritani)

¹⁰ Gila: One of ten permanent detention camps called relocation centers by government; housing internees from March 1942, and all closed by November 1945. (*Ten Visits* by Frank and Joanne Iritani)

¹¹ Rohwer and Jerome, Arkansas, permanent detention camps.

him take it home. And then we had some wedding presents there, and they wouldn't let us take it home--Japanese kimono¹².

HIDA: Is that the one you wore . . .

ITO: Yes, the one I wore for the wedding, so we had to go and just have--what is it--a suitcase.

HIDA: But they wouldn't let you go back and get that and put it in your one room, those kimonos?

ITO: No, they wouldn't let us take anything out of the house.

HIDA: I see. OK. So then you went to the Assembly Center. Did you walk there?
How did you . . .

ITO: No, we had the car yet. I don't know what happened to the car, but we did have a car. We rode on the car to the Assembly Center.

HIDA: I see. OK. Tell me about the Assembly Center. Was it a --what kind of building?

ITO: Well, kind of We slept on the hay.

HIDA: How many people were with you? Just your two boys and your husband?

ITO: Let's see, two boys and father and mother and so there were six of us, I guess.

HIDA: Six, I see. So you all had beds of hay all in one area then?

ITO: One single bed

[END TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

¹² Kimono: Japanese clothes

HIDA: This is Tape 2, Side 1, Mrs. Shizuko Ito. OK, we were talking about going to camp and you were saying about how it was all dark. They made you put the shades down? Is that right?

ITO: The train, yes, they pulled all the shades down. You can't see outside. Then as you drive to the camp, we thought, "My goodness, where are we going?"

HIDA: It was stuffy?

ITO: Well, dusty and not developed at all.

HIDA: And then you saw the barracks--all the barracks when you went to camp?

ITO: Yeah.

HIDA: OK. And again your family went into one part of the barrack, right?

ITO: Yeah, luckily we had the front barrack. It was pretty big.

HIDA: I see.

ITO: So, [we were] all together.

HIDA: So there wasn't any kind of partition between your husband's parents and you and the boys?

ITO: No. We were all in one big room.

HIDA: OK. And tell us about the rest rooms again.

ITO: Restrooms? Restroom was a separate building in front. You had to go out of the room to that.

HIDA: And what about the showers or the baths?

ITO: I don't remember the showers--funny thing, but I imagine it was in the back of there.

HIDA: I'm told there wasn't much privacy? Did you have to . . .

ITO: Oh, I think the tops were all gone.

HIDA: Open.

ITO: Yes, just sections.

HIDA: Were there walls between the stalls?

ITO: Yeah, walls. Each toilet had a wall.

HIDA: I see. And what about the showers? Doors?

ITO: I can't remember the showers. I don't know why.

HIDA: OK. What was everyday life like in the camp? What did you do all day?

ITO: Well, the children would go to eat but they didn't eat, so I'd bring them home-- take the food home. And then I had to wash the dishes and bring them back to the [mess hall].

HIDA: OK, I see. So they would have been quite young at that time, right?

ITO: Yes. Let's see, Tomi was--I think--was he seven? No, he couldn't have been seven--1938, so he was . . .

HIDA: Four or five? He was three when he went in.

ITO: Three, and I know Shunji was a baby yet--one and a half.

HIDA: And he didn't--and they didn't like the food?

ITO: No, they didn't learn very--they didn't eat very much, so I had to bring them home--bring the food home. Then I had to wash the dishes and then bring them back again. That was my work.

HIDA: Plus doing laundry and things like that, right?

ITO: Oh, yes. Evidently, we had to wash too.

HIDA: So, what was your husband doing during this time? Was he working?

- ITO: He was a fire inspector, so he got \$16. No, was it. . . . Anyway, the top overall [wage] was \$19 [per month]. And then the other under people were getting \$16. He was a fire inspector so he used to go around and inspect the bad groups.
- HIDA: To see if there was anything that was dangerous that could cause a fire, right?
- ITO: Uh-huh, yeah.
- HIDA: That's good. Were there other clubs or activities that any of you did?
- ITO: Oh, there were but we didn't. I had to take care of the family. And then too he had trouble with his stomach, and he was in the hospital for one week.
- HIDA: This is your husband, right?
- ITO: Uh-huh. In camp. He raised a lot of fuss. [Chuckles] So they finally sent him home.
- HIDA: He didn't think the hospital was very good or anything?
- ITO: Oh, I don't know. Anyhow, he came home in one week. And then they had one block where they sent the people with poor stomachs [ulcers], so he ate at that restaurant--I mean--
- HIDA: Mess hall.
- ITO: Yeah. And he didn't go to our kitchen.
- HIDA: I see. So then he got better--he got better then?
- ITO: Uh-huh. He said they fed him things without any taste. But if you had nothing else to eat, you eat it.
- HIDA: Yeah, OK. Well, during this time were you communicating at all with your two sisters at the other camp? Did you exchange any mail?
- ITO: I don't think we ever received any mail.

HIDA: From anybody, you mean?

ITO: No, but there was a hakujin¹³ man that took care of our building. [Nippon Bldg was owned by four families.] He came to report to ojichan and obachan¹⁴. But after that nobody came.

HIDA: Do you remember when the loyalty questions came out--the loyalty oath? Questions 27 and 28?¹⁵

ITO: Oh, I did hear something like that, but I didn't do much. My husband said he wouldn't go--go to war. He wouldn't--they didn't say anything else.

HIDA: He wouldn't go to the--he would not fight for Japan, right? He would not fight for Japan?

ITO: No, I don't suppose so. He wouldn't fight for Japan either.

HIDA: OK. Then in camp, do you remember having Matsuko in camp?

ITO: Yes, 1945, January 4.

HIDA: Was that hard having a baby in camp?

ITO: No.

HIDA: Smaller hospital, maybe?

ITO: In one hospital, all lined up.

HIDA: I see. So nothing special about that?

¹³ Hakujin: Caucasian

¹⁴ Ojichan, grandfather; obachan, grandmother

¹⁵ Loyalty questionnaire entitled "Statement of United States Citizenship of Japanese Ancestry" (Selective Service Form 304A). No. 27. "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered?" No. 28. "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any other foreign government, power or organization?"

ITO: No. I don't know how we did handle it, but evidently we put him [second son, Albert] in bed, I guess. We only had one cot--that's all.

HIDA: You didn't have a crib or . . .

ITO: No. No crib.

HIDA: Did you get any special food? Sometimes when you are pregnant you don't feel good.

ITO: I don't know. I didn't like milk.

HIDA: Did you get nauseated when you were pregnant at all in camp?

ITO: No.

HIDA: Oh, you really had it easy.

ITO: [LAUGHTER]

HIDA: OK. So you went to the hospital and you had Matsuko and then you came back and Maybe you were in the hospital only a week or so or a few days to have the baby?

ITO: No, I don't know. It wasn't very long.

HIDA: So what do you think--did the--how did the camp affect your family relationship. Was there any change?

ITO: What do you mean--family relationship?

HIDA: Well, the kids were out playing more and you weren't together as much.

ITO: They used to go out and play and sometimes fight, and I would put Tomi in a closet. He broke a hole in the door.

HIDA: In the school or in the--where was the closet?

ITO: Closet--they had a room or something--not exactly a room but it was like a closet and we put him in there and he broke . . . [broke out using tools that were stored in the closet, he says!]

HIDA: This was at school?

ITO: No, not school-- at the home.

HIDA: In your barrack.

ITO: In your barrack there was a place next to it.

HIDA: So was he fighting with his brother or with other kids?

ITO: I don't know what it was but anyhow they put him in the closet for some reason.

HIDA: What was your worst memory of camp if you had to choose your worst one?

ITO: Worst thing?

HIDA: Worst thing about camp.

ITO: I don't think--I don't remember anything bad. Yes, naturally, sometimes the food wasn't good. Especially in the Fresno Assembly Center, the food was half cooked.

HIDA: OK, then what was your best memory of camp?

ITO: [LAUGHTER] Best? Lot of people.

HIDA: Did you make a lot of friends there?

ITO: Mostly all Fresno people were in this section, like the Zenimura's and who else? and, oh, Yamasaki's. We knew them before camp.

HIDA: These are people from Fresno that maybe you had more time to talk to or you were closer--lived closer.

ITO: More time to talk to them.

HIDA: I see. So more community.

ITO: Yeah, Mr. Zenimura. Lots of baseball.

HIDA: Baseball team?

ITO: They started--they could play games.

HIDA: I see. So anything else about camp?

ITO: No, I guess we became friends.

HIDA: How did you find out camp was over?

ITO: Oh, because people started to go. We were the last ones from the 28 block to go.

HIDA: Why was that?

ITO: Because our house wasn't vacated.

HIDA: Oh.

ITO: So we--it was on October--end of October. We went to the Buddhist Church and we stayed at the Buddhist Church until our house was vacated.

HIDA: So you mentioned going to the Methodist Episcopal Church when you were a girl, but I guess after you got married, then you started going to the Buddhist Church. Is that right? In Fresno.

ITO: Yes, after we got married.

HIDA: I see. So how long did you stay in the temple or at the Buddhist Church?

ITO: I think about three months. We stayed in one room. We went to eat in the kitchen in the basement.

HIDA: Just your family or more . . .

ITO: Oh, no. There were a lot of people who didn't have any place to go stayed there until they had, you know, found . . .

HIDA: So where did you go then after the three months?

ITO: We went to our house. I guess they gave them three months to find somewhere else to go.

HIDA: So was everything okay when you went back to your house?

ITO: We went back to the house and then we sold the house.

HIDA: Was your stuff still there though?

ITO: No, some things were missing [\$98], so I put in a claim for it, and got money for it.

HIDA: Did you? That's good. And then you moved to another house or something?

ITO: There was no We moved to this--we went back to the old house and--in 1930--'45. We must have stayed there about four years, then. I think it was 1949, I think we sold the house.

HIDA: What kind of work then was your husband doing when you got out of camp. The store was gone, right?

ITO: First, he was collecting money from the people that used to come and sell produce at the . . .

HIDA: Market?

ITO: Market, uh-huh, and he used to collect 35 cents to do it and what else did he do? Then after that he got a job at Baloian. [Produce]

HIDA: What's that?

ITO: The produce house . . .

HIDA: Oh, OK.

ITO: . . . and then he used to clean and general help, I guess. Then he was. . . . He had a backache or something, so he quit.

HIDA: So was it hard back then getting work--for Japanese Americans to find work you think?

ITO: No, I don't think so to find a job.

HIDA: So you don't think there was too much . . .

ITO: Because these boys in produce associated with a lot of Japanese people--farmers.

HIDA: So he did okay. So he didn't have to worry about prejudice or anything?

ITO: No, no prejudice.

HIDA: I see. That's good. So you got settled and then your . . .

ITO: I think I got a job at this [Armenian-owned] Marbo Quality Foods, so I was working there and when he wasn't working, he used to take me to work and pick me up.

HIDA: I see. So were you the support of the family for a while?

ITO: Yes, more or less. I retired from Marbo Foods.

HIDA: That was again doing office work, right?

ITO: Yes. Then too -- the redress. We got the redress.

HIDA: That was a lot later though, right?

ITO: Maybe I was working so I don't know.

HIDA: Do you remember how old the boys were when you started working? By then, Ann too. How old were the kids?

ITO: Shunji started after we got back.

HIDA: School?

ITO: Yes, first grade. He [Albert Shunji] didn't go to preschool. Tomi went to both-- what was it--preschool for about a half year. What do I have here?

HIDA: Now, you said Tomi went to--Tomi would have already been in school and Shunji started first grade. Ann would have still been at home, right?

ITO: Yes.

HIDA: Did they go to Japanese school? How was it resettling?

ITO: He didn't go to Japanese school right away.

HIDA: No, but later they did?

ITO: They went to Japanese school.

HIDA: What do you remember about Shu coming back from China?

ITO: Yeah, after the war. When she came back, there was a friend, Nadae Hori, came and wanted to stay with me for a couple of days, and she took her home [from the boat] to San Jose.

HIDA: Shu took . . .

ITO: Nadae took Shu to her house in San Jose, and then afterward, I suppose--they brought her over to Fresno.

HIDA: I see. OK. So why don't we retrace what Shu had done. She had gone over there in the mid-thirties to get married but then she didn't, right? In Japan?

ITO: Yeah, and then she went to . . .

HIDA: China, right?. Hankow?

ITO: Her mother's relative in Tokyo and I don't know where else she went. And then maybe during the war or before the war she went to China.

HIDA: And during this time she's doing household jobs?

ITO: Huh?

HIDA: She was helping--she was a house helper--helping--her job? Remember, in China . . .

ITO: I don't know who she was helping, but she was in China doing some kind of work, I guess, to support herself.

HIDA: Yeah, I'm trying to remember . . .

ITO: Then she met the Inui family--the ones that came to America later.

HIDA: She lived with them, right, in China?

ITO: Oh, maybe she did.

HIDA: I thought she was a helper there. Shu came to your home?

ITO: And my father-in-law told her, "You ought to get--do some work. So then she got work in a Chinese place, I guess it was.

HIDA: In Fresno.

ITO: And then your [grand] mother came to sell her house in Sacramento and so when she went back to Wisconsin, she went with her.

HIDA: She took Shu with her, I see.

ITO: And then Shu started to work--got a job in a lawyer's office or something.

HIDA: In Milwaukee. OK. That makes sense. Now, can you bring us back up to date on your life now at age 94? Tell us about your life now. You live with your son [and daughter-in-law].

ITO: Yeah. She [Bernice] takes care of me. Does my washing. Gives me my meals and takes me to the doctor.

HIDA: You're lucky. Do you get together with other Japanese American people? Do you have any Japanese clubs like lunch . . .

ITO: I didn't join any club. I'm still donating to the--what do you call it?

HIDA: In Fresno?

ITO: Yes. I haven't this year, but I did, and I'm still a member of the Fresno Bukkyo Fujinkai.¹⁶ It takes \$3 a year.

HIDA: Oh, a bargain!

ITO: That's all. So I didn't join San Jose because my grave is in Fresno, so eventually I have to send it to Fresno.

HIDA: I see. OK. So do you have family nearby? Do you want to tell us about your family?

[END TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B]

HIDA: We were talking about Shizu's children and grandchildren. We said that she is living with her son, Tomi and Bernice in Campbell, and they have three [grown] children.

ITO: Laura, Ken and Emi. [Shizu's grandchildren] Laura got married to Tom Kamigaki.

HIDA: We better repeat Albert Shunji, son number two?

¹⁶ Bukkyo Fujinkai: Buddhist Women's Organization

ITO: Albert got married to Agnes Leong and she has one son, Matthew Makoto, and two step-daughters, Katy Leong and Tamu Leong. Katy got married to Ken Musil.

HIDA: Your daughter and son-in-law also live in San Jose, right?

ITO: Yes, my daughter Ann Matsuko is married to Russell Hisao, I think it is Kageura, and they have three children, Michelle Michiko, Scott and Kristine Kimberly.

HIDA: She just got married?

ITO: And she got married to Todd Carpenter.

HIDA: OK, good. Recently--what was it--ten years ago, you received a redress. You got redress from the government. Can you tell us about that? Remember about getting the letter? Were you happy?

ITO: Oh, naturally, we were happy. [LAUGHTER] Hide and I, we both got \$20,000 each. And Tomi got it--\$20,000. And Shunji must have gotten \$20,000.

HIDA: If there was another war and another evacuation, what do you think the Japanese Americans should do? If that happened all over again, what should we do?

ITO: Protest.

HIDA: We should protest, you think?

ITO: If they say they are going to put us in camp again.

HIDA: What do you think is the best thing that Nisei men have done for America?

ITO: What have they done?

HIDA: We have some that are politicians now. Of course, we have [Assemblyman]
Mike Honda and [Congressman Robert] Matsui.

ITO: [Mike] Masaoka-san.

HIDA: So maybe that's good.

ITO: Well, as a group, Japanese have not caused much trouble. Isn't that true?

HIDA: Yes.

ITO: Of course, there are some people who did something bad but, as a group, they
are quiet.

HIDA: Role-model citizens.

ITO: Yes.

HIDA: What do you think is the best thing Nisei women have done for society?

ITO: What have they done, Bernice? [LAUGHTER]

BERNICE: Nisei women? [INAUDIBLE] [Bernice added that Nisei women have been
good parents.]

ITO: You know, in the newspapers now-a-days, ladies have become a judge, they
have become professors-- what else?

HIDA: Do you have any advice for young people today?--Since you're 94 years old,
you've experienced a lot.

ITO: No, [LAUGHTER] I haven't done very much. [LAUGHTER]

HIDA: Oh, yes, you have. How many pounds of rice have you cooked in your life?
Aren't your kids successful? The Nisei women silently add strength, I think, to
the population.

ITO: You sound a lot like Bernice. She works hard and she does her work at home.
But I'm not--I'm nothing to be proud of.

HIDA: Oh, certainly! You're the perfect example of the unsung heroine.

ITO: Just living, that's all.

HIDA: So maybe your recommendation to young people is to work hard like your daughter-in-law does.

ITO: [LAUGHTER] I have no advice because I'm not much of a person myself.
I'm just living.

HIDA: You are an excellent Nisei woman example. And I think you've done very good.
You came back from the internment experience and you resettled and you went on with your life without being angry. Not everybody does that, so I think you've been very successful. Just like a lot of other Nisei women. The Nisei men wouldn't--they wouldn't be where they are now if it wasn't for the Nisei women who helped to support them take care of the kids and keep things organized.

We appreciate your talking about your 94 years into the tape recorder.

This is going to be really interesting for future generations, so thanks again for sharing your story with us.

[END TAPE 2, SIDE B]

NAMES LIST

Florin Japanese American Citizens League
Oral History Project
California Civil Liberties Public Education Program Grant

INTERVIEWEE: Shizuko Ito

INTERVIEWER: Susan Hida

COOPERATING INSTITUTION: Oral History Program
California State University, Sacramento, California

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Hide	Sister	Shizuko Ito	4
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